

29. *White's 'Cameos from the Silver-Land.'*

[Cameos from the Silver-Land, or the Experiences of a Young Naturalist in the Argentine Republic. By Ernest William White. Vol. I. 8vo. London: 1881.]

This work, by a naturalist well known to many of us, commences with several chapters of general remarks upon the Argentine Republic, in which a variety of useful information is given. The author then gives an account of his visit to Cordova and Mendoza, in which several passing allusions will be found to birds, to the study of which Mr. White is specially devoted*. At San Juan, under the Andes, in the home of a medical gentleman, Mr. White "was grieved to be the witness of a literary sacrilege" such as he never before beheld. "The floor of the drawing-room was strewn with the wreck of Gould's magnificent work on the Toucans; and I trembled lest that on the Trochilidæ, which was at hand in a book-case, should share the same fate: these splendid tomes, the gift of well-known English ornithologists from the West Indies on their visit to San Juan, leaving their natural use, had degenerated into nursery playthings."

XIV.—*Letters, Announcements, &c.*

We have received the following letters addressed to the Editors of 'The Ibis':—

Dresden, 16th July, 1881.

R. Zoological Museum.

SIRS,—Perhaps the news would interest the readers of 'The Ibis' that a *Sarcorhamphus gryphus* in the Dresden Zoological Gardens has lately hatched two young ones in eight weeks and four days. This happened in the Zoological Society of London's Gardens, if I am rightly informed, in six weeks two days, a hen hatching the eggs in the latter case.

Yours &c.,

A. B. MEYER.

* Cf. Ibis, 1881, p. 599.

Dunipace House, Larbert,
Oct. 10th, 1881.

SIRS,—I wish to record in a few words the occurrence in Scotland for the first time of the white-spotted form of *Cyanecula*, viz. *C. wolfi* (C. L. Brehm). It was obtained at the lantern of the lighthouse on the Isle of May on the 22nd of September 1881, and was sent to me for identification by our reporter there, Mr. Agnew, along with an adult male Redstart and a Goatsucker, the latter being the first occurrence of that species also at Isle of May. According to Mr. Agnew's schedule, returned at the same time, the wind was light westerly on the 17th, with haze. The next record occurs on the 22nd, the date of the capture of this specimen and of numerous arrivals of Redstarts, Mavises, Swallows, Golden Plovers, Ring-Plovers, Curlews, &c.—indeed, the record of a "*rush*" of migrants. On that day the wind was strong S.E.; and it continued all day. The present specimen, now in our collection here, was caught or killed after midday. Mr. Agnew writes, "weather very thick haze, approaching to fog, with a continuous downpour of rain." "All the birds," adds Mr. Agnew, "seen today seemed perfectly bewildered." The bird is a specimen in that "peculiar autumn plumage" figured by Dresser ('Birds of Europe,' vol. i. pl. 50, see also p. 350). I should have liked to have given you a more extended notice of this occurrence, with some remarks upon a subject which I consider of some importance, viz. the distribution of the occurrences of rare European species in Britain; but I fear to occupy too much space; I propose therefore to send these longer remarks to the 'Zoologist.'

Yours &c.,

J. A. HARVIE BROWN, F.R.S.E. &c.

Northrepps, November 26, 1881.

SIRS,—In 'The Ibis' for 1881, p. 606, Count Salvadori suggests that the specimen of *Urospizias albigularis* figured on pl. viii. of the same volume is too young to "have the dimensions of a fully adult male." I am desirous of stating

two reasons which induce me to differ from this opinion. In the first place, the bird, as mentioned in my description of it, had already assumed more or less of the adult plumage on the forehead, nape, mantle, chin, throat, and breast; and secondly, this specimen was thus ticketed by Lieut. Richards, who obtained it, "♂. Iris bright yellow, feet orange; 27th August, 1878;" whereas a specimen, probably, from the date when it was killed, about eight months younger, and in which the bases of the primaries were still in their sheaths, subsequently procured by Lieut. Richards in the same locality, was marked by him thus, "♂, young. Iris drab, feet yellowish; food lizards &c.; 16th December, 1880." The fact of the changes of colour accomplished in the eyes and feet of the first specimen, and commenced in its plumage also, seem to me to indicate that it had advanced sufficiently towards maturity to be already full-grown.

I may add the following measurements, taken from the second and younger male:—wing 7·9 inches, tarsus 2·2, middle toe *s. u.* 1·5.

Yours &c.,

J. H. GURNEY.

Durham, Dec. 1, 1881.

SIRS,—I have been much interested by Dr. Selater's very interesting addition to the known species of the restricted genus *Erythrura*; and while unhesitatingly admitting both his species (though *E. regia* comes extremely close to *E. pealii*, which, judging from the five specimens before me, is a rather variable species), I must demur to his attempt to unite *E. cyanifrons* of Layard with *E. trichroa*. By an error reference is made to "Ibis, 1879, p. 280," instead of "p. 191." There I have pointed out the distinction between these two species, viz. that the bill of *E. cyanifrons* is scarcely half the size of that of its congener. In fact, the difference is as great as between the bills of a Linnet and a Greenfinch. When writing, I had before me seven examples of the one and eight of the other (a fair series for comparison), and the distinction was constant and uniform.

I grant that the bills of the Fringillidæ are often a variable quantity; but here we have the case of a genus which, like *Myiagra* and *Ptilopus*, seems to vary in every Pacific group; and it would be, *à priori*, most improbable and contrary to analogy that identical species should be found so far apart as Batchian &c. on the one side and New Caledonia on the other, though we should expect a blue-masked species there, just as we now find a red-masked species in New Hebrides, nearer to the red-masked types of Fiji and Samoa. I trust therefore that *E. cyanifrons* may not be so pitilessly put out of existence.

Yours &c.,

H. B. TRISTRAM.

Newcastle, Natal,

3rd November, 1881.

SIRS,—I am happy to be able to tell you that, though prevented by political motives from prosecuting any further operations against the Boers, some of us are hard at work in these parts in a campaign against the birds, and have, I hope, collected between us a respectable amount of specimens and information concerning them.

Capt. E. A. Butler, Royal Irish Rifles, Capt. H. W. Feilden, 6th Dragoons, and myself are all quartered here, and are working together with a view to the compilation of a joint "Contribution to the Ornithology of Natal," which we hope will see the light in a future number of 'The Ibis.'

Newcastle is not a good station for the collector, there being but little bush and but few scattered "vleys" or marshes; but we have now somewhere about 180 species on record, and hope to make this up to 200 before we leave, with the additional kinds we may meet with on the march down to Durban.

Yours &c.,

SAVILE G. REID, Capt. R.E.

5 East View, Hyde Park, Leeds,
December 3rd, 1881.

SIRS,—The second occurrence in the British Isles of

Emberiza rustica, Pall., may be deemed worthy of a record in the pages of 'The Ibis,' to which the late Mr. Gould communicated the news of the bird's first appearance in Britain, in 1867 ('The Ibis,' 1869, p. 128).

On the 17th of September last, after a lapse of fourteen years, a bird of this species was shot on the sandhills of the Yorkshire coast, near to the village of Easington, in Holderness, by Mr. Townend, the schoolmaster. The specimen, supposed by those who have examined it to be a female, was given to Mr. P. W. Lawton, a local ornithologist, in whose possession it remained unidentified until I visited Easington on the 7th of October.

I sent the bird to Professor Newton; and it was exhibited by him at the Meeting of the Zoological Society on the 15th of November.

Yours &c.,

WM. EAGLE CLARKE.

The Generic Term Goniaphea.—Dr. Coues (Bull. Nutt. Orn. Club, v. p. 98) says that he has carefully examined Bowditch's 'Excursions in Madeira'* without finding any reference to the generic term "*Goniaphea*"—a name often applied (as first suggested by G. R. Gray, Gen. B. ii. p. 357) to the Rose-breasted Grosbeak of North America. Having lately had occasion to investigate this subject, I have succeeded in discovering the passage in Bowditch's work; and, in order to try and set this vexed question at rest, I transcribe it. Speaking of an excursion from Funchal, in Madeira, Bowditch says (p. 29), "I saw another and more curious bird, but I doubt if it is a native of the island. The outline of the beak most resembles that of the Widow-bird (*Vidua*, Cuv.); but the commissure is situated like that of the Grackle (*Gracula*, Cuv.), immediately beneath the nostril, and forms a much deeper angle; it evidently belongs to the Conirostres

* The full title of this work is 'Excursions in Madeira and Porto Santo during the Autumn of 1823, while on his Third Voyage to Africa,' by the late T. Edward Bowditch. 4to. London: 1825.

of Cuvier; and I should place it under the name of *Goniaphea*, between *Fringilla* and *Corythus*."

In a footnote Bowditch adds, "The upper mandible closes over the lower, and the middle toe is longer than the others; the whole bird is black, with the exception of the head, which is azure in *G. leucocephala*." A woodcut of the bill is given at the end of the work.

Now it is quite evident that the bird here spoken of is not *Hedymeles ludovicianus* (a species, moreover, very unlikely to have turned up in Madeira); for the description and figure do not in the least agree with it. Further, no such bird as is here described being found in Madeira, we may, I think, consider the name *Goniaphea* as void for uncertainty. If I were to make a guess as to what bird Bowditch had in view when writing the passage in question, I should say that it might have been one of the African Weaver-birds (*Pyrenestes capitalbus*). It is quite possible that he might have obtained a skin of the latter bird during his mission to Ashantee, and afterwards confounded it with specimens procured in Madeira.

While, however, I quite agree with Dr. Coues that *Goniaphea* cannot be employed for the Rose-breasted Grosbeak, I do not think it necessary to reject *Hedymeles*, Cab. (1851), because Sundevall (Kongl. Vet. Ak. Förh. 1846) proposed to apply "*Hedymela*" to *Muscicapa atricapilla*, for which it is never used. Our excellent fellow-worker will forgive us, I trust, if we prefer Dr. Cabanis's "*Hedymeles*" to Dr. Coues's more recently proposed term "*Zamelodia*."—P. L. S.

Cestrelata jamaicensis (Bancroft).—Of this Petrel Mr. D. Morris, of the Botanical Department, Jamaica, writes as follows to 'Nature' (Dec. 15, 1881, vol. xxv. p. 151):—"During certain seasons of the year it is remarkable that this sea-bird should be found in holes under trees and in burrows on the Cinchona plantations and in the unfrequented woods of the Blue Mountain range, at elevations from 6000 feet to 7000 feet.

"The natural inference was that the birds make their

nests on these places. But, although careful search has been made during the last two years, and a reward offered for nests, eggs, or any signs of nidification, nothing whatever has been found in that direction. It is therefore very probable that the birds use these holes and burrows simply as resting-places during the day, whence they sally forth at night to their feeding-grounds at sea. The latter is distant only, as the Crow flies, about twelve or fourteen miles. The birds are found in their burrows chiefly during the months of November, December, January, and March. Sometimes two lie in one hole, and the dogs easily find them; but it has been noticed that the birds are always full-grown, and with no apparent nest. I have been led to send you these remarks in the hope that possibly some of your readers with a wider knowledge of the habits of Petrels might be able to give some clue as to the locality and general character of their nesting-places."

Loddigesia mirabilis.—At the Zoological Society's Meeting on the 15th of November last, Messrs. Taczanowski and Stolzmann's memoir on this most wonderful of Humming-birds was read, and a series of skins showing the different plumages of the adult male and female and young male was exhibited. The adult male of *Loddigesia* is stated by the authors to possess only four rectrices, the two conspicuous external feathers and a diminutive median pair. The long middle tail-feathers represented in Gould's figure of this species are, in reality, the middle pair of *under* tail-coverts. This tail-structure is quite unique in the class of Birds.

IN 'The Times' of the 9th of July 1881 was announced the death of Dr. Hildebrandt, who has added so much to our ornithological knowledge of Eastern Africa. He had been driven back by the rains in an attempt to penetrate into the southern part of Madagascar; and his name must be added to the long list of those explorers who have fallen victims to their zeal in that unhealthy island. He died on the 29th of May 1881.